



# **BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT SURVEY**

**2023**

Five questions were asked of each graduate, and the results from each question from 2019 to 2023 are detailed below:

## Question 1: How are your university studies primarily funded?

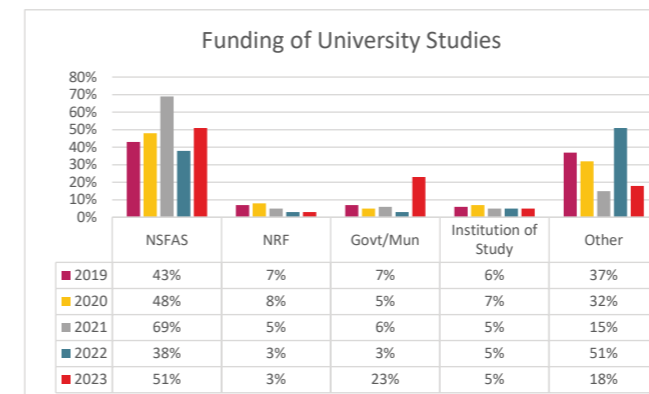
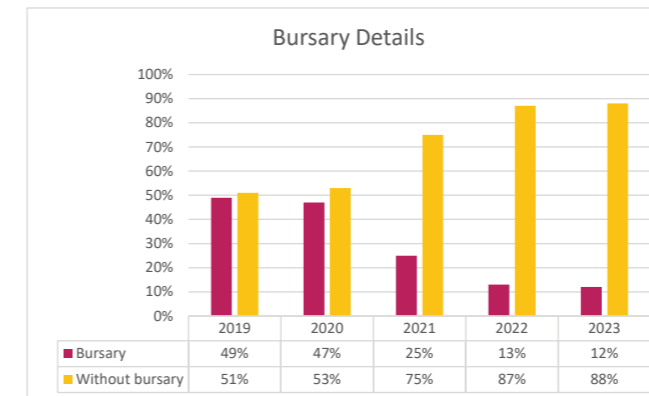
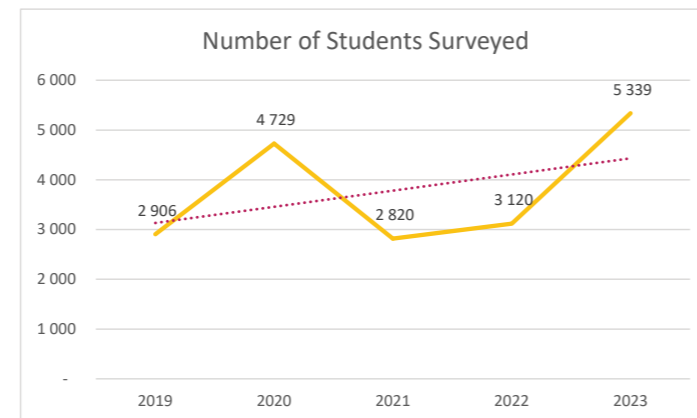
A survey to determine the view of tertiary level students from South African institutions, on barriers to their employment – a year-on-year comparison from 2019 to 2023.

The goal of the survey is to better understand how graduates perceive their employability in the marketplace, and to provide future employers with insights into how graduates think and see themselves when stepping out into the employment market. The survey was first conducted in 2019, and has now been running for five years.

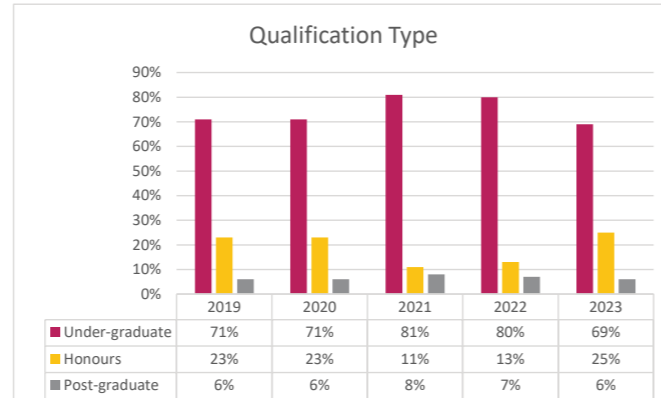
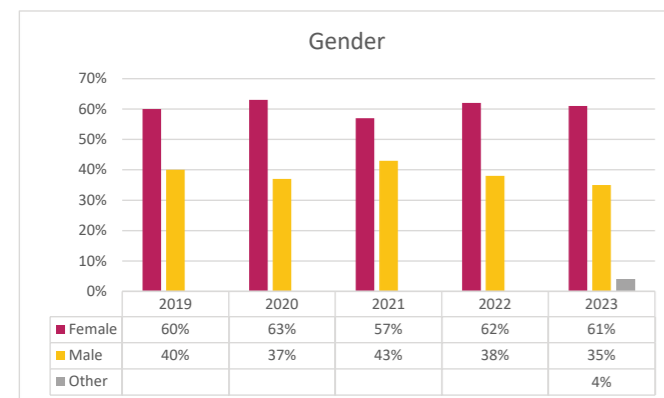
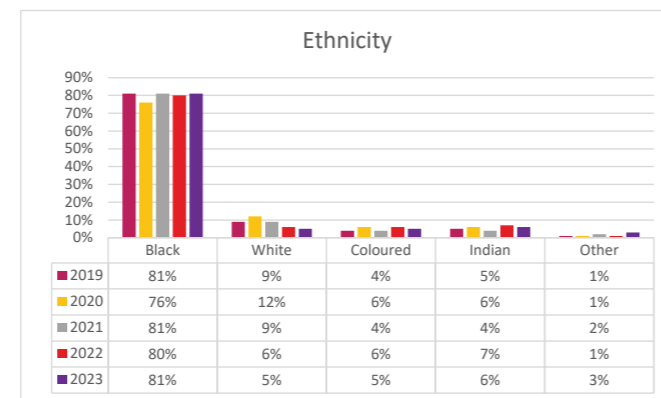
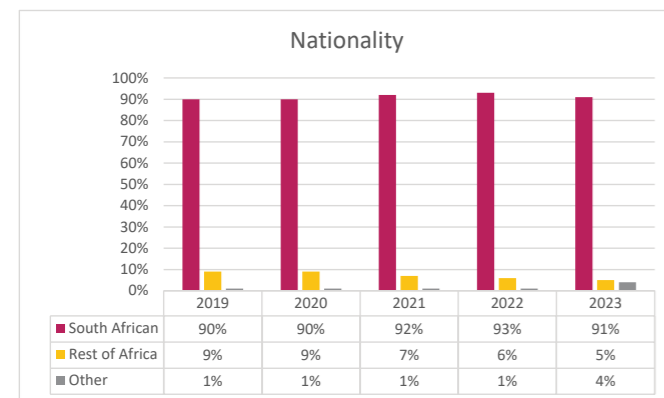
A web-based survey was used, which was completed by students when they registered to enter the GradStar Awards for the year in question, which starts on 1 July and ends on 30 June.

The report aims to understand the following:

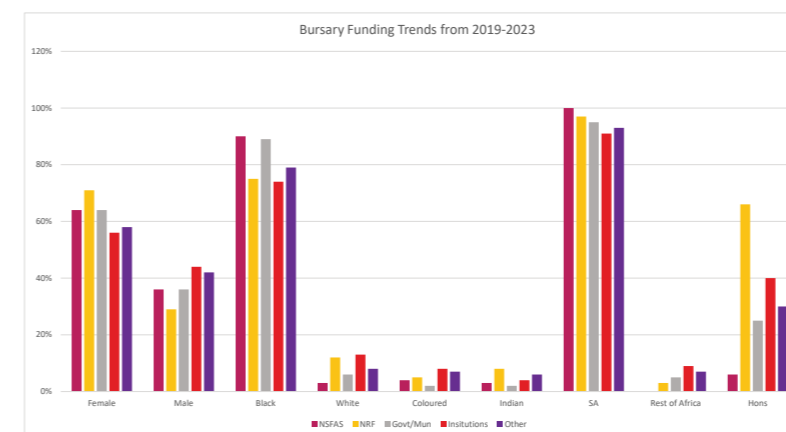
- How students' studies are funded.
- The work readiness of students and their preparedness for employment.
- The institutions used to engage in work readiness programmes, where students have done so.
- The level of confidence felt by students regarding their employability soon after graduation.
- The challenges or barriers students experience or anticipate when looking to secure graduate employment.



## Demographics



Data from the past five years shows that allocations from funding sources to the students surveyed has been relatively stable across demographics:



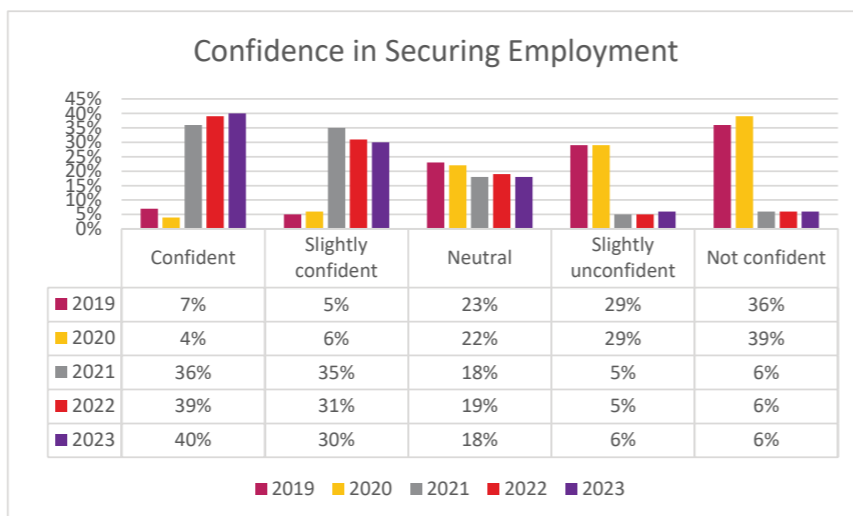
**50%** NSFAS remains the primary bursary provider, funding 50% of bursaries over the 5-year period.

**51%** Black females are the recipients of 51% of all bursaries awarded over the 5-year period.

**9%** While government has averaged 9% of bursary funding, this is largely due to a spike to 23% in 2023, from a previous average of 5%.



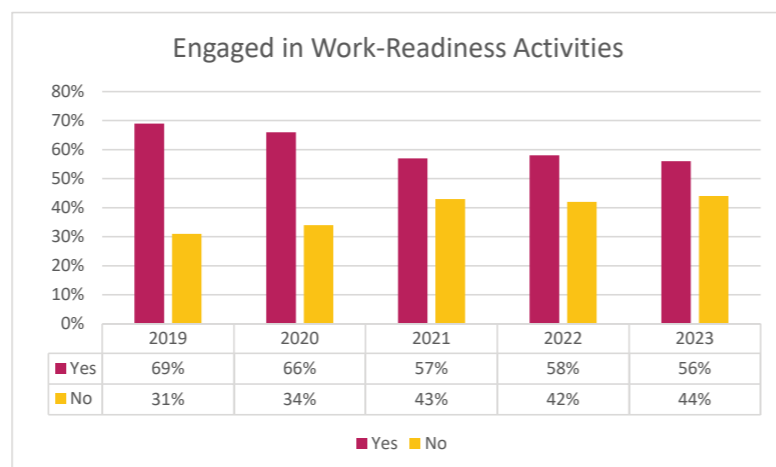
**Question 2:**  
How confident do you feel about securing graduate-level employment within 3 months of completing your degree?



**23%** Over the 5-year period, an average of **25%** of students display confidence in securing employment. **The average for past three years is higher, at 35%.**

**46%** **Black females** show the highest level of confidence in securing employment, at **46%**

**Question 3:**  
Have you already started to engage in any work-readiness activities?



**61%** Over the 5-year period, an average of **61%** of students are engaging in work-readiness activities before their studies are completed.

**47%** **Black females** show the highest level of engagement in work-readiness activities, at **47%**.

**Question 4:**  
If you answered Yes to the previous question, please indicate who these opportunities were offered by?

Data from the past five years shows that the majority of employment opportunities continue to be sourced by students through the **career services offered by their universities.**

**Employers** offer the second highest opportunities, either through the workplace or on-campus activities.

**29%** Over the 5-year period, an average of **29%** of students have sourced employment through **university career centres.**

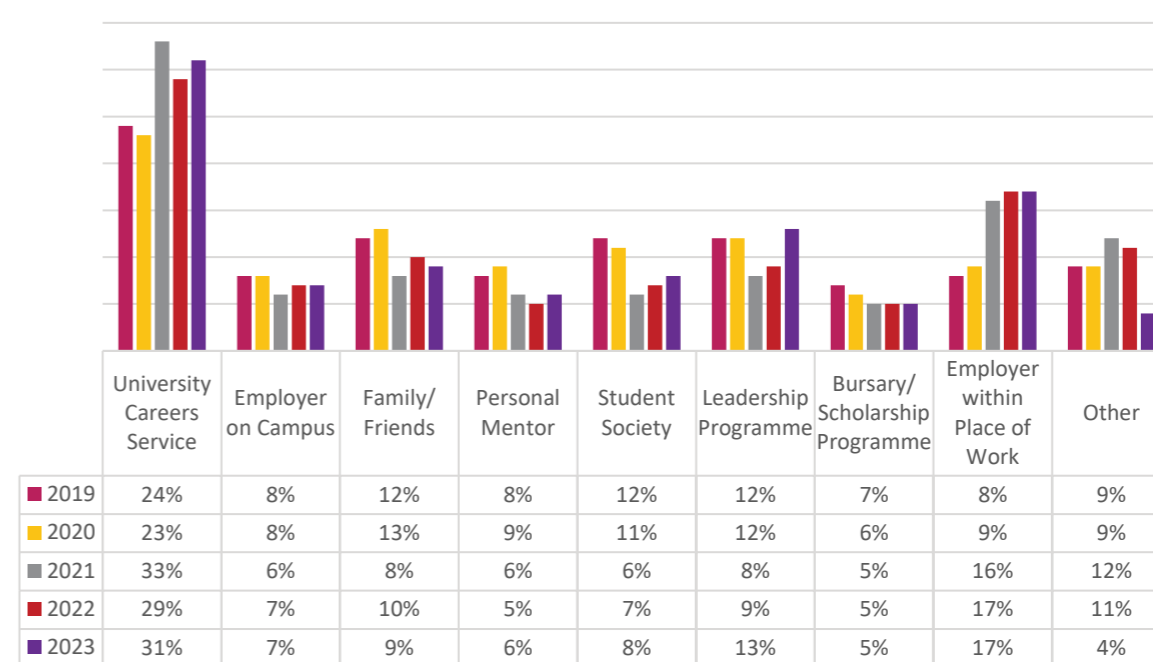
**10%** **Employers** are responsible for **10%** of career opportunities for students surveyed over the past five years, either through the workplace, or on-campus activities.

**9%** Capitalising on **personal relationships** such as mentors, family and friends accounts for **9%** of workplace opportunities accessed by students over the five-year period.

**46%** **Black females** show the highest success in sourcing workplace opportunities, at **46%**.



**Source of Employment Opportunities**



**Question 5:**  
What barriers have you experienced when looking to secure graduate employment?



Barrier/Challenge	% of Students
Experience is required for employment. However, students lack the required work/practical experience. There are not enough graduate programmes to provide for practical experience.	
There are not enough graduate programmes and work opportunities in specific fields. Also, some fields of study are new and not recognised in the workplace yet.	
Lack of knowledge and guidance of how to compile a professional Curriculum Vitae, and not enough guidance as to where to start looking for employment.	
High unemployment rate in South Africa and high number of graduates in specific fields.	
Lack of finances to pay for resources like internet, data, printing of CVs, travelling to interviews, further studies or skills acquisition.	
Being an international student is a challenge – immigration process, non-inclusion in graduate programs, not considered for employment due to nationality, and limited opportunities in country of citizenship.	
Do not know how to prepare for an interview or what to expect. Struggle with assessments and/or psychometric test. Not always able to get to the assessment or have resources (computer and internet) available to complete them.	
Gap between theory and practical application in the workplace. Also, lack of skills outside the field of study, such as ability to stand out, financial skills, computer skills, psychological skills, time management, working as a team.	
Lack of mentorship and connections, or guidance and support from family and/or friends.	
Not enough advertising of graduate programmes and work opportunities.	
Geographic location – finding opportunities in areas of residence is difficult as there are less opportunities in rural areas and small towns. Relocating is unaffordable and sometimes not practical. There are also limited resources in rural areas such as internet, computers, and ability to print a CV.	

## DISCUSSION

The past five years were challenging for the students completing these surveys, from student strikes in 2019, to COVID-19 lockdowns during 2020 and 2021, and economic downturn, rising fuel prices and extended loadshedding in 2022 and 2023. Despite these challenges, results show year-on-year stability in most instances, **a testament to the resilience of our youth.**

Specific factors that could therefore impact the results of the surveys over the past five years, include the following:

- Unstable study environment
- Uncertainty over whether students would be able to complete their studies during strikes.
- Increased uncertainty around employability.
- In 2020 and 2021, a hard initial lockdown, along with subsequent lockdowns that included school and university closures, affected attendance and continuity for students, and the subsequent return to full-time studies.
- Home environments not always conducive to studying, including lack of suitable space, connectivity challenges and access to resources.
- Extended periods of loadshedding impacts students who do not have a reliable source of alternate electricity.
- General increase in unemployment statistics in South Africa over the past two years, although recent statistics are starting show improvement in this area.
- Lack of access to funding for fees - parents or funders may have lost their jobs or experienced other economic impact as a result of the pandemic and its knock-on effects.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **NSFAS** is the primary source of bursaries in South Africa.
- Confidence in securing employment after graduation continued to **increase**, despite the high unemployment rate in South Africa.
- **Engagement in workplace readiness activities** has remained stable over the past three years, although still lower than in the surveys conducted in 2019 and 2020. This could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a reduction in face-to-face opportunities being provided by employers and other programmes.
- **University careers services** remain the primary source of employment opportunities for students.
- A significant percentage of students still feel that **graduate programmes** are not well advertised and that they are unable to find these opportunities.
- Graduates entering the workplace feel they need **more guidance** on where to find employment.
- **The high unemployment rate in South Africa, and lack of access to graduate programmes, remain the most prevalent concerns for graduates entering the workplace.**



**PROUDLY PRODUCED BY:**

**BLACKBARK**  
PRODUCTIONS

FIRST FLOOR, HARRY GOEMANS CENTRE  
151 MAIN ROAD  
HEATHFIELD  
7945  
CAPE TOWN  
+27 21 788 2763

To support future research reports, please contact:  
● Laura Barker, CEO: BlackBark Productions  
[laura@blackbark.co.za](mailto:laura@blackbark.co.za)